

**Division of Environmental Health Services:**

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Foodborne Illness Complaints

Environmental Health Services encourages you to report any potential food related illnesses to the Division of Environmental Health Services (DEHS). These reports allow DEHS to investigate potential outbreaks. Often, calls from concerned citizens are how outbreaks are first detected. If a public health official contacts you to find out more about an illness you had, your cooperation is important. In public health investigations, it can be as important to talk to healthy people as to ill people. This cooperation may be needed even if you are not ill.

An outbreak of foodborne illness occurs when a group of people consume the same contaminated food and two or more of them become sick with the same illness. It may be a group of people that ate a meal together somewhere, or it may be a group of people who all happened to buy and eat the same contaminated item from a grocery store or restaurant. Symptoms from a foodborne illness can occur between several hours and one week after eating contaminated foods.

For an outbreak to occur, something must have happened to contaminate a batch of food that was eaten by a group of people. There are several causes of foodborne outbreaks. For example, a contaminated food may be left out at room temperature for many hours, allowing the bacteria to multiply to high numbers, and then be insufficiently cooked to kill the bacteria.

Follow these simple steps to prevent foodborne illness

CLEAN: Wash produce. Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables in running tap water to remove visible dirt and grime. Remove and discard the outermost leaves of a head of lettuce or cabbage. Because bacteria can grow well on the cut surface of fruit or vegetables, be careful not to contaminate these foods while slicing them up on the cutting board, and avoid leaving cut produce at room temperature for many hours. Do not be a source of foodborne illness yourself. Wash your hands with soap and water before preparing food. Avoid preparing food for others if you yourself have a diarrheal illness. Changing a baby's diaper while preparing food is a bad idea that can easily spread illness.

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SEPARATE: Do not cross-contaminate one food with another. Avoid cross-contaminating foods by washing hands, utensils and cutting boards after they have been in contact with raw meat or poultry and before they touch another food. Put cooked meat on a clean platter, rather than back on one that held the raw meat.

COOK: Thoroughly cook meat, poultry and eggs. Using a thermometer to measure the internal temperature of meat is a good way to be sure that it is cooked sufficiently to kill bacteria: 145°F for whole meats (allowing the meat to rest for 3 minutes before carving or consuming), 158°F for ground meats and 165°F for all poultry. Eggs should be cooked until the yolk is firm.

CHILL: Refrigerate leftovers promptly. Bacteria can grow quickly at room temperature, so refrigerate leftover foods if they are not going to be eaten within 4 hours. Large volumes of food will cool more quickly if they are divided into several shallow containers for refrigeration.

If you suspect that you have a food related illness, please let DEHS know by completing the online complaint form at: <http://www.sbcounty.gov/ehlus/Depts/Complaints/onlinecomplaintform.htm>.

For more information, contact the County of San Bernardino, Department of Public Health, Environmental Health Services, at 909-884-4056 or visit our website at www.sbcounty.gov/dehs.

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